

Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources
www.iowadnr.gov

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NOTE: Due to the Thanksgiving holiday, there will not be an Iowa Fishing Report this week.

1. Rare Bird Sightings Make North Central Iowa A Birding Hotspot – by Lowell Washburn [electronic photos available upon request]
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[electronic photos available upon request]

Five Unusual Species Observed This Week in Mason City/Clear Lake

RARE BIRD SIGHTINGS MAKE NORTH CENTRAL IOWA A BIRDING HOTSPOT

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Check this. How would you like an opportunity --- all in one place --- to view, photograph, and listen to such feathered rarities as a snowy owl, Ross' goose, American black duck, and ocean going black scoters? As if that's not enough to peak your Rare Bird Sighting Thrill-O-Meter, then how about throwing in a pair of incredibly rare immature Atlantic brant for good measure?

Does such a place actually exist, you ask. Indeed it does. And it's exactly what has currently put Clear Lake and Mason City on this year's Birding A-List. The word is out, and wildlife enthusiasts are already traveling from across the state – and beyond – to view this once in lifetime collection of unusual winged wonders.

The saga began more than a week ago with the appearance of a single snowy owl along Clear Lake's south shore. The bird soon settled into the neighborhood at Bell Harbor and, according to local residents there, immediately began a one bird crusade to rid the lake of coots. During the past week, the bird [a chocolate and white mottled

immature] has been seen along both the north and south shores of Clear Lake where it continues to draw considerable attention.

In Mason City, the campus of the North Iowa Area Community College is creating even more birding excitement. During the past several days, NIACC ponds have become temporary home to a snow-white adult gander Ross' goose, two black scoters, and at least one American black duck. Ross' geese nest on the arctic tundra and primary wintering areas are the Sacramento Valley in California as well as the coastal wetlands of Texas and Mexico. Black scoters reach their highest nesting densities in arctic Alaska and normally winter along the Atlantic seaboard from Nova Scotia southward.

Although these species are certainly rare enough to be noteworthy winter migrants, it was the sudden appearance of two immature Atlantic brant that really put North Iowa in the driver's seat in the category of this year's downright weird; I really can't believe my eyes, bird sightings.

The pair was first spotted grazing on a campus lawn as NIACC instructor and renowned birding expert, Paul Hertz, went for lunch on Thursday. Since then, the birds have remained "on campus." When not busy trimming the lawn, the pair keeps company with the hundreds of Richardson's and giant Canada geese currently residing at nearby ponds.

Atlantic brant are a tiny seafaring goose that nests from northern Greenland southward to Canada's Baffin Island. Most winter on Long Island Sound or along the coast of New Jersey where they exist on aquatic beds of saltwater eel grass. Less than a dozen Atlantic brant have ever been documented in Iowa.

So what natural phenomena have caused all of these far flung and rare avian travelers to converge on Northern Iowa's Cerro Gordo County at one time? No one can say, or even speculate, for that matter. But one thing is certain. North winds blew the birds in and it is likely a wind will move them on – perhaps sooner than later. Don't miss the firsthand opportunity to see these rare migrants for yourself.

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THE FIRST OF IOWA'S ANTLERLESS-ONLY DEER SEASONS BEGINS FRIDAY

Iowa's 3-day November antlerless deer season begins Nov. 28. Geared around the Thanksgiving holiday, this season offers an opportunity for family and friends to hunt together, harvest some quality venison, and help manage Iowa's deer herd.

Licenses went on sale on November 15 in counties where the antlerless license quota remained unfilled. Shotguns, handguns, muzzleloaders, and bows may be used and party hunting is legal. Last year about 11,550 licenses were issued with a reported kill of 4,526 deer for a harvest success of 39 percent. Statewide, that represented 5 percent of the reported doe harvest for 2007 and in many of the counties where antlerless licenses were available, the kill represented from 5-12 percent of the reported doe harvest for those counties. Deer harvested during this season represent a positive step towards attaining herd goals within the state.

The majority of southern and eastern Iowa herds are still above desired levels and antlerless harvest in these areas, especially adult does and doe fawns, is the only long-term method for reducing population size. Deer herds with reduced densities typically produce higher quality animals, help alleviate crop depredation, and reduce the rate of automobile/deer collisions.

The November antlerless season is open from November 28 through November 30. Hunting hours are from one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset. All deer taken must be reported using the harvest reporting system by midnight the day after the deer is recovered. This is the third year where hunters have reported their kill and it is a very important part of the deer management program in Iowa, playing a vital role in managing deer populations and hunting opportunities. Hunters can report their deer on the DNR website (www.iowadnr.com), by calling the toll free reporting number (1-800-771-4692), or also at a license vender. For hunters with Internet access, the online reporting of the harvest is a quick and easy way to register your deer.

Individuals interested in purchasing antlerless licenses for other hunting seasons should act now in many counties to avoid losing the opportunity. It is also a good time to purchase licenses for one of the shotgun seasons to avoid the long lines and holdups that are inevitable for those who wait until the last minute.

MEDIA CONTACT: Tom Litchfield, state deer biologist at (641) 774-2958

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STEPHENS FOREST BIRD CONSERVATION AREA DEDICATION

CHARITON - A ceremony to dedicate the Stephens Forest area as Iowa's newest Bird Conservation Area (BCA) will take place December 11, at 1:30 p.m. The event will be held at the Lucas County Conservation Board Headquarters at Pin Oak Marsh, located about 1 mile south of Chariton along Highway 14.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is hosting the dedication that will include brief presentations and the unveiling of a special Bird Conservation Area sign. Following the ceremony, there will be a short driving tour of Stephens Forest.

"Designating Stephens Forest as Iowa's thirteenth official Bird Conservation Area will give state and national recognition to the area's importance for resident and migratory forest birds," said Bruce Ehresman, DNR wildlife diversity program biologist. "The Stephens Forest complex holds some of the largest tracts of contiguous forest in the state, and these forests appear to be critical nesting habitat for large forest species such as Kentucky warbler, wood thrush, ruffed grouse, and red-shouldered hawk."

"The creation of Bird Conservation Areas in Iowa is a priority for DNR's wildlife diversity program and is part of a larger international effort promoting assistance for birds with the greatest conservation need," said Doug Harr, coordinator of the wildlife diversity program.

The emphasis of the Bird Conservation Area program is encouraging habitat conservation at a large landscape level to establish stable or growing bird populations. Each BCA includes a combination of well-managed public and private lands; and the Stephens Forest area, with its

existing tracts of public forests interspersed with privately owned forests, is the ideal candidate for Iowa's next forest Bird Conservation Area.

The Stephens Forest BCA is the result of state, federal, and county agencies, and private organizations and citizens working together to emphasize the importance of bird habitat. Some of these partners include Lucas and Clarke county conservation boards, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Iowa Wild Turkey Federation, and private landowners. "This cooperative effort represents a partnership that serves as a fine example of ways to better conserve all natural resources in this unique forested landscape," says Jessica Flatt, DNR area forester and Stephens Forest manager.

"Bird watching is one of the nation's fastest-growing outdoor activities, and this new BCA is likely to attract even more bird enthusiasts from throughout the region. The result should be growth in the local tourism economy while also building sustainable local bird populations," Harr said.

The public is welcome to attend this event. Bird watchers and appreciators of forests alike are asked to join this celebration of dedicating this very important forest Bird Conservation Area.

For more information, contact Ehresman at (515) 432-2823, Harr at (515) 281-4815 or Flatt at (641) 774-4559.

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SHOTGUN SEASON IS DEER SEASON FOR MOST IOWA HUNTERS

The shotgun seasons continue to be the most popular among Iowa hunters with about 197,000 either-sex and antlerless licenses being sold in 2007. The first of Iowa's two shotgun deer seasons gets underway on December 6 and lasts for 5 days. It is followed by the second shotgun season, which opens on December 13 and runs through December 21. Hunters with paid licenses can only hunt during one of the two seasons.

Last year approximately 85,000 deer were reported during the two seasons and represented 60 percent of the reported harvest for the 2007/08 deer seasons, including the harvest from the 3-day shotgun season extension. Typically, the shotgun seasons represent an even higher proportion of the annual deer harvest in Iowa but the 2007 season was plagued with extreme weather conditions. Hopefully, shotgun hunters will experience better hunting conditions this December.

The shotgun seasons also represent a significant contributor to the state's antlerless harvest. In 2007, about 45 percent and 52 percent of the harvests were does during the Shotgun 1 and Shotgun 2 seasons respectively. Overall, the does killed during the shotgun seasons represented 55 percent of the reported doe harvest in Iowa during the 2007/08 seasons.

The temperatures in Iowa have been more normal this fall although the majority of the state is still above normal for precipitation with river bottoms being flooded frequently this year and as recently as mid-November for portions of Iowa. The main

breeding season or “rut” was winding down during the last week of November and a second smaller rut should occur near mid-December.

With the cooler weather and the ending of the breeding season, daily deer activities will again be centered around feeding and bedding areas. Crop fields, alfalfa, food plots, and edge areas will be receiving the bulk of the feeding activity this year. Much of acorn crop has been consumed, hidden, or sprouted (white oak group) by this time of year. The river bottoms have less forage available overall due to the frequent flooding they experienced this year.

The crop harvest also causes deer to redistribute themselves to take advantage of the remaining cover areas. Iowa’s harvest was up to two weeks behind schedule, meaning there was a lot of standing corn and some soybeans still in the field as of Thanksgiving. As the weather permits more producers to harvest these remaining fields shifts in deer distribution will occur in these areas also. After a couple of days of hunting, hunters should not be shy about checking out unlikely small patches of cover or tall vegetation. Often deer will use these areas simply because many hunters never think to hunt them.

Properly sighting in your firearm is one of the most important things a hunter can do to help ensure a successful hunt. Drive hunting is an Iowan tradition during the shotgun seasons and is one of the factors that allow a large number of deer to be harvested efficiently. However, drivers and blockers need to always remain aware of the location of all hunters and make sure their field of fire is safe.

Hunters using treestands are reminded that tree stand safety is crucial for a safe hunt. Hunting is generally very safe but climbing into and out of trees should be done with care. Hunters should inspect all of their gear to make sure it is in good condition and is working properly. Hunters should never get into a treestand without a safety harness.

In general, hunters can expect to find similar numbers of deer in northwestern, north central, and central Iowa while deer numbers in eastern and southern Iowa have declined some from 2007. However, deer populations are still strong in central, northeastern, and southern Iowa with densities still above objectives. Hunters can help farmers and landowners by taking an antlerless deer or two during their season of choice. Hunters can also utilize the HUSH program to donate deer to the Iowa Food Bank and provide needed meat for Iowans. Last year hunters donated more than 8,300 deer to the HUSH program making it one of the largest such programs in the nation.

A tagging requirement that is new for 2008 requires a hunter who kills an antlered buck to place the transportation tag on the animal’s antler. It is recommended that the tag be placed on the antler beam either at the base or between two points. This new law was passed by the Legislature during their last session.

Hunters using blinds during the shotgun seasons are reminded that they are required to display at least a 12-inch by 12-inch piece of blaze orange that is visible from all directions, as outlined on page 22 of the 2008 Iowa Hunting and Trapping Regulations.

License holders for the youth deer season who did not harvest a deer are eligible to use the license and unused tag during one of the two shotgun seasons. However, the youth hunter must follow the weapons restrictions that are in place during the season (a

shotgun or muzzleloading rifle only for youths) and be under the direct supervision of an adult mentor.

Hunting hours are from one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset. All deer taken must be reported using the harvest reporting system by midnight the day after the deer is recovered. This is the third year where hunters have reported their kill and it is a very important part of the deer management program in Iowa, playing a vital role in managing deer populations and hunting opportunities. Hunters can report their deer on the DNR website (www.iowadnr.com), by calling the toll free reporting number (1-800-771-4692), or also at a license vender. For hunters with Internet access, the online reporting of the harvest is a quick and easy way to register your deer.

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NATURAL RESOURCE COMMISSION TO MEET DEC. 11 IN DES MOINES

DES MOINES - The Natural Resource Commission of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources will meet at 8:30 a.m., Dec. 11, in the fourth floor conference room, Wallace State Office Building, in Des Moines.

Commission and DNR staff will meet at 1 p.m., Dec. 10, at the Wallace State Office Building, for informational presentations. Both meetings are open to the public.

Members of the Commission are William Bird, Gregory Drees, Kim Francisco, Elizabeth Garst, Tammi Kircher, Carol Kramer, and Janelle Rettig. The Director of the DNR is Richard Leopold.

The following is the agenda for the Dec. 11 meeting.

- Approve Agenda
- Approve Minutes of Nov. 13 Meeting
- Director's Remarks
- Honey Creek Resort State Park Monthly Update
- Construction Projects
 - Stephens State Forest, Whitebreast Unit, Lucas County – Pond Outlet Replacement
 - Lake Wapello State Park, Davis County – Lake Restoration
 - Green Valley State Park, Union County – Spillway Renovation
- Land Acquisition – Loess Hills State Forest, Harrison County – William and Shirley Harl
- Contract Extension with Erickson Management Company – Banner Shooting Range
- Notice of Intended Action, Chapter 78 - Ginseng Harvesting and Sale

- Hardwood Timber Sale – Yellow River State Forest
- Hardwood Timber Sale – Preparation Canyon State Park
- Notice of Intended Action, Chapter 61 – State Park and Recreation Areas
- Concession Contract Renewal – Lake Ahquabi State Park
- Notice of Intended Action, Chapter 94 – Deer Hunting by Nonresidents
- Lost Island Lake Restoration Project Phase 1
- Fiscal Year 2009 Low-head Dam Public Hazard Cost-share Grant Program
- Printing Agreement for Fishing Regulations
- 2009 NRC Meeting and Tour Recommendations
- Donations
- General Discussion
- Items for Next Meeting, Jan. 8, in Polk County

For more information, contact Melissa Speed, at 515-281-8650.

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